

## Optional Features for Outdoor Learning Areas

### Wildlife Habitat

**Description** – Wildlife viewing can be achieved by providing food, water, shelter, and space to the species native to your area. Survey the grounds to find what is already on site. There may be trees, brush piles, snags, and other naturally occurring habitats just waiting for you to preserve them. Birds, hummingbirds, butterflies, bees, bats, and squirrels are easily attracted to native plantings and feeding stations. Reptiles and amphibians may be provided cover and nesting areas by including brush and rock piles on the edge of a small pond. Deer, turkeys, and pheasants may be attracted to feeding plots. Having these opportunities for observation, inquiry, and investigation can enhance learning for students.

**Size** – A small suburban lot may not attract as many wildlife species as a 5-acre lot, but by landscaping that space with wildlife in mind, you can provide optimum habitat per square foot of space.

**Location** – Locate your wildlife habitat within easy access of the school building, away from high traffic areas. Empty lots behind buildings, away from play areas are ideal sites for wildlife habitats. The most important key here is to make sure there is plenty of cover. A food plot, bird feeders, or salt block with no nearby place for wildlife to hide serves little purpose.



**Materials Needed** – Basic to all wildlife viewing areas are trees, shrubs, and other plants to provide shelter and food for wildlife. The types of plants you use for food and cover will determine the wildlife species attracted to your schoolyard. Include conifers to provide good winter cover and summer

nesting cover. Consider native species first. It is crucial to plant a variety of species and select plants that flower and bear fruit at different times of the year. Logs, rocks, and other in-water structures provide drinking and basking habitat for turtles, butterflies, and songbirds. Dead or dying trees and fallen trees can be homes for woodpeckers and other small animals. These snags (dead trees) should be at least 6 inches in diameter and 15 feet tall. A larger snag is preferred.

Rocks may need to be submerged on the north end of ponds. Terrace the rock pile up to the edge to attract frogs, toads, turtles, skinks, and snakes. Create den sites by placing a 12-15 feet diameter, 5 feet high brush pile in a sheltered area along the edges of fields and woods. You may include nesting houses for bats and birds. Leave food plots of corn, millet, or other grains in a specific area, purchase commercial feeders, or make the simple gravity feeder pictured above. Use a 4-inch diameter PVC pipe approximately 3 feet tall. Cap it and cut a small notch at the bottom of the pipe for gravity feeding. Mount the feeder on a post or platform. Enhance the area by pouring a concrete pad near your viewing area and making permanent imprints of the tracks of local wildlife.

**Labor Needed** – Labor is needed to build and install houses and feeders, establish brush and rock piles, plant appropriate native species, and pour the concrete pad.

**Technical Assistance** – Check with nurseries, area conservation districts, and cooperative extension agents on what grows best in your area. Contact your local fish and wildlife agency for information on wildlife and assistance in making the imprints of wildlife tracks. Make arrangements to have the agent on site during the pouring of the concrete pad so that imprints can be made before the concrete hardens. See (<http://weba.ky.gov/genericsearch/LicenseSearch.asp?AGY=17>) for how to contact these offices in your county.

**Maintenance** – Checking that feeders remain full and providing water in watering areas during dry weather will keep wildlife visiting the area.

**Challenges** – The best single thing you can do for wildlife is minimize the use of chemicals. There may be visitors to feeders that do damage, such as raccoons damaging bird feeders